

Wednesday, October 18, 2000

Duxbury Clipper

15

Teaching Children Fire Safety Through Play

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

Over two hundred first graders at Chandler School participated in the Duxbury/Kingston S. A. F. E. program this past week. The Student Awareness Fire Education program's trailer, known by the children as the "Fire Safety House," assimilates a fire, with special smoke effects, allowing kids to practice an escape plan from its miniature-sized kitchen, living room or bedroom.

The event occurs each year as part of the school's fire drills, said Duxbury firefighter PJ Hussey. It also coincides with National Fire Prevention week, officially declared by President Coolidge in 1925 to recognize, "one of America's worst fires in history, the great Chicago Fire of October 9, 1871, which claimed more than 250 lives and destroyed 17, 430 buildings," said the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

This year at Chandler, three of the town's firefighters. Chuck Nudd, Chris Murphy and PJ Hussey, ran the trailer program under the direction of Lieutenant John Bowser.

"It's hard to do this with so many students, so we broke up each class of students so that while half the class was going through the trailer program, the other half was learning about what fire fighting gear looks like," explained Hussey.

Before the "escape," Lt. Bowser explains to the children what they should know when a smoke detector sets off an alarm or a fire occurs in their home. Life saving information, such as touching a closed door to see if it is hot before opening it during a fire evacuation is taught to the kids by feeling a hot door during the evacuation, noted Hussey. Concerns and questions the children have are also addressed by the firefighters before the "pretend" smoke is set off in the room.

"The kids all love to escape out the window and climb down the fire ladder," noted Lt. Bowser.

The department began incorporating gear viewing as part of the program to teach children not to be afraid of a firefighter. "We say to them, 'okay kids this is what firefighter Chuck will look like if he ever comes to your house,'" said Hussey. The last thing a firefighter needs to encounter during an evacuation of a house fire is a child who won't come with the firefighter because he or she is afraid of how he looks, he added.

Duxbury and Kingston jointly purchased the S.A.F.E. trailer in 1996 with the assistance of a state grant and several local businesses and organizations. "The total cost of

the trailer was approximately \$25,000 and the two towns share in its use," noted Dave McKee, a deputy fireman for the Kingston Fire Department.

The Duxbury Fire Department stresses the importance of making sure all your smoke detectors work, and knowing what to do in the event there is a fire in your home or an alarm goes off. "One of the most important things is to have two escape routes from every room in your house," added Hussey.

As a parent going through the roll-play of the Fire Safety House, you quickly recognize the importance of having a family fire escape plan. It was not until my experience with the trailer that I realized our family had never practiced a "fire drill," or designed a fire escape plan.



Nicole Cowden shakes the hand of Firefighter/EMT Brian Monahan, as he is dressed in his firefighting gear. The children at Learn 'N Play Preschool learned that the firefighter is there to help them, and they should not be afraid of him, even if he does look scary!

following information (see chart) from the Duxbury Fire Department and the National Fire Safety Council to design our family's plan of escape:

It is also important to teach children what to do if their clothes catch on fire.

You can have your children practice dropping to the ground

and rolling out the pretend fire. The Duxbury firefighters also stress that children need to be reminded frequently that they shouldn't play with matches or cigarette lighters, and "to keep them away from your sister, brother and friends."

Each year in the United States there are roughly

500,000 home fires, 20,000 home fire injuries and 5,000 home fire deaths according to the National Fire Safety Council. The Duxbury S. A.F.E. Program teaches children precious fire safety information in a fun and relaxed way.

Then I thought about this fact from the N.F.P.A. - it takes only two minutes for a typical living room fire to become deadly, or less after the smoke alarm sounds, and such a fire "has the potential to kill household members in as little as four and half minutes."

When I consider how long it takes me just to get the kids out the door to go on an errand, I decided it was time to design a fire escape plan. I utilized the

DESIGNING YOUR FAMILY'S FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

Include the entire family in your preparations.

Map out two escape routes from every room.

Purchase chain ladders for exiting from above the first floor.

Make sure that windows can be quickly opened in the event you must exit a fire.

Discuss and agree on what to do with a pet if fire breaks out - you may not have time to save your pet.

Designate a place outside the home where family members can meet after escaping from a fire.

In a fire, crawl low on the floor with your mouth and nose covered with a cloth or towel until you can exit. (This is because smoke rises to the ceiling as it fills a room.)

If in your bed, roll out of the bed and crawl low on the ground.

Feel the door with the back of your hand before opening it. If it's hot, or if you can see or smell smoke, don't open the door. Use an alternate escape route.

Go to your designated meeting place and stay put. **DO NOT GO BACK INSIDE.**

Hold family fire drills and practice how to exit in case of a fire.